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The age system of the Nyakyusa has been described in detail in *Good Company*;[1] but, since it forms the basis of their social structure, a brief explanation must here be given for the benefit of readers unacquainted with that earlier volume. Within each chiefdom there are a number of villages composed not of kinsmen but of age-mates. Village begin when small boys of eight or ten years build together at a little distance from their fathers. They are joined by younger brothers, as these reach the age when boys stop sleeping at home until the eldest are in their middle teens, when the youngsters will be told to begin another village. The boys of a village have their own leader, a 'natural' leader, not specifically appointed, but they are subject to the headman of their fathers' village, and formerly fought as a group under his direction. But as the 'coming of' a headman for each village is selected from among its members by the fathers: if he dies, his heir—a younger brother or son—shares his position, so that sometimes a young man becomes headman of an old man's village, taking the name and social position of his father. Only commoners are eligible as headmen: we know one candidate who was rejected because his great-grandfather was a chief.

Two villages in each chiefdom are senior to the others and their headmen are responsible each for half of the country. During the 'coming out' rites the chief marries two wives, 'mothers of the country', and is established in each senior village or capital (*ikinguluhi*). The eldest sons of these two wives are the heirs, and later divide the old chief's country between them. Most of the chief's junior sons are divided between the capitals but some may be settled in subordinate villages in appropriate country. All the chief's sons build with commoners in villages appropriate to their age, and all save the two heirs are subject to the commoner headmen of their villages. They are entitled to some support as 'sons of the chief', and those of strong personality gain a following and settle disputes between their fellows (as may any commoner), but only the two senior sons can claim political authority.

Before the 'coming out' the villages of young sons and their fathers adjoin, for the boys have built on their fathers' land, on the fringes of their fathers' villages. But at the 'coming out' there is a new deal in land. The young sons are established in the centre of the country and their fathers move to the periphery; it is not merely that fathers and sons exchange land, but all the boundaries

[1] Monica Wilson, *Good Company*, 1951.

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are redrawn and only the fields in old *ntaka* (the most prized and fertile of all) are not re-allotted. Thus the villages of kinsmen of two generations adjoin, and often those of three generations.

On the old chief's death his village headmen become priests of the grove in which he is buried, and, in co-operation with his son, the new chief, sacrifice there on behalf of the two countries into which his old chiefdom is divided. There is a nice balance of power between chief and village headmen in life, and when he dies his two heirs and the headmen (or their heirs) continue to share power, the power which belief in his spiritual force and their ability to guide it gives them. The success or failure of rituals is held largely to depend upon the personal relationships of the leading participants, chiefs and commoner priests.

Besides the ordinary commoner priests (the village headmen of a past generation or their heirs) there are priests of the chiefs' lineage, usually belonging to a junior line to which specific ritual functions, such as rain-making, have been entrusted, and whose office is hereditary in the same way as that of a chief. Kasitile [illegible],[1] the rain-maker, is such a priest: his grandfather was the brother of a ruling chief (*ng'*) and had been appointed as rain-maker (*umpalyale*) and priest (*mpuga*), the two functions being separate but overlapping. As rain-maker Kasitile tended the rain stones, as priest he initiated the rituals in certain of the sacred groves, though he did not actually officiate himself. Kasitile was a key informant on ritual and a chapter is devoted to his history, since it epitomizes the relationships between chiefs and commoners.

As we have shown, most of the Nyakyusa and Ngonde chiefs claim some sort of kinship with one another. Those who are nearly related pray together at the graves of their common ancestors, and these more distantly connected join in sacrifice to their founding fathers, but in the communal rituals kinship is neither the dominant theme nor the exclusive principle of association, as it is in the rituals celebrated by private persons. In the communal rituals most of the priests are commoners unrelated to the dead who are honoured, and the sacrifices are held to benefit not only the descendants of the dead, but all those who live in the countries they once ruled. Nevertheless, the symbolism of the communal rituals commonly recalls that of the rituals of kinship; themes which pervade the death ritual recur again in the rituals of 'coming out' and 'dressing the country'. This background is

[1] Footnote about a name refer to the genealogy of Nyakyusa chiefs facing p. 9